



Pak-India Civil Society Organizations Demand release of 900 fishermen

Karachi: 27 April 2010: Pakistani and Indian civil society organizations have demanded immediate release of about 900 fishermen languishing in Indian and Pakistani jails and urged the two governments to stop indiscriminate arrests of poor fishermen in future.

This demand has been made in a letter sent to Mr. Yousuf Raza Gilani, prime minister of Pakistan and Dr. Manmohan Singh, prime minister of India on Tuesday, 27th April 2010 by six civil society organizations which include Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) from Pakistan, and Focus on the Global South, National Fishworkers' Forum, Boat Owners' Association, Porbandar and Peace Mumbai from India.

The letter simultaneously released to press from Delhi and Karachi on Tuesday says that 580 Indian fishermen are languishing in the Pakistani prisons and about 460 of these imprisoned fishermen have completed their sentences but have not been released.

Similarly, there are 247 Pakistani prisoners including 150 Fishermen in Indian jails. They have been granted Consular Access to High Commission for Pakistan in New Delhi and to whom travel documents have also been issued by the High Commission. A large number of these Pakistani prisoners have completed their sentences or are minors. All such Pakistani prisoners be released without any further delay, the organizations demanded in the letter.

The letter cites a recent judgment of Indian Supreme Court regarding the case of 17 Pakistani prisoners who had completed their sentence. The Indian Supreme Court had observed that the government cannot keep such prisoners in detention in violation of the fundamental rights. "The right to life and liberty was not dependent on another country's action," the court had observed.

The letter sent on the occasion when prime minister of Pakistan and India are expected to have a bilateral meeting on the sidelines of SAARC summit taking place in Bhutan, says that despite the fact that the two countries have formed a joint Judicial Committee on Prisoners which comprises well know jurists, recommendations of the Committee are not implemented. "Clear and unambiguous orders to the concerned departments of the two countries may also be issued to ensure compliance with the unanimous recommendations of the official India-Pakistan Judicial Committee on Prisoners," demanded the letter.

India-Pakistan Joint Judicial Committee on Prisoners, set up in January 2007 comprising four retired judges of high courts and supreme courts from each county, had recommended release of all Indian and Pakistani fishermen in custody. This recommendation is yet to be implemented. The Committee had also recommend steps for humane treatment and expeditious release of their nationals from the respective prisons.

The letter also demands that the trawlers seized by authorities worth millions of rupees should also be handed over to original owners.